

PUBLIC HEALTH REPORT

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A GRANT OF \$160,000 for research into the basic causes of child accidents has been awarded the State Health Department by the National Institutes of Health.

Accidents in California now kill 1,100 children under the age of 15 each year, hospitalize 25,000 and send another 600,000 for medical care. The hospitalization and medical care in such cases cause loss of some 2,000,000 school days annually.

Recognizing that prevention of such injuries depended upon knowing why certain children were injured while others were not, and that only sketchy information was available on causes, the department began about five years ago to give scientific study to injuries. The State Health Department pioneered in measuring the extent of injuries in the United States through the 1954-55 California Health Survey and through local studies in San Francisco, Santa Barbara, and Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

The department now is pioneering in applying epidemiologic methods to identify the causes of specific types of childhood accidents, such as poisoning, burns and auto-pedestrian trauma.

The grant gives further support to a nationally recognized epidemiology laboratory for study of childhood injuries which was established in 1956 by the Alameda-Contra Costa County Medical Association, the California Department of Public Health, 23 hospitals in the two counties, the University of California School of Public Health, the Alameda and Contra Costa county health departments, and the Berkeley city health department.

The laboratory currently analyzes reports on about 30,000 injuries a year which occur among children under the age of 15 in the two counties.

St. Vincent's Hospital in Los Angeles has been approved by the department's Crippled Children Services as a place to perform open heart operations using the artificial heart-lung machine. It is the third facility in California approved by the program for the performance of such operations.

The hospital also was approved as a new center for the diagnosis and treatment of congenital heart disease, bringing to 11 the number of approved centers.

Encouraging progress by California medical scientists studying the pathologic effects of air pollution was reported at the Second Air Pollution Medical Research Conference sponsored by the State Health Department.

Previous studies by the department and its associated investigators had failed to demonstrate an immediate effect of air pollution on death or sickness rates. At the conference it was reported that the death rate from pulmonary emphysema has increased 400 per cent in California in the last seven years.

Pulmonary function of Los Angeles patients with the disease was shown to improve substantially if during smoggy weather the persons are kept in a room whose air supply is filtered through activated charcoal to remove the smog.

A year-end look at activities of the department's new Division of Alcoholic Rehabilitation showed that more than 3,700 patients were admitted to treatment and a total average caseload of 1,500 was maintained in the seven community alcoholism clinics whose operating costs are reimbursed in full or in part by the state.

Outpatient clinics are located in San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, San Jose, Stockton, Los Angeles and San Diego. More alcoholic patients were treated in California last year than in any other state, according to preliminary national estimates. California has an estimated 600,000 alcoholics and the highest estimated rate of alcoholism in the nation.

Treatment consists of medical and psychological diagnosis, medication, individual and group psychotherapy, family counseling, cooperation with Alcoholics Anonymous, or a combination of methods. Sources of clinical referrals were: Self, relative or friend, 37 per cent; law enforcement agencies, 29 per cent; welfare and medical agencies, 22 per cent; Alcoholics Anonymous, 7 per cent; other, 5 per cent.

General hospital treatment of acute alcoholism was demonstrated successfully by the division in 1958, with the completion of projects at Mt. Zion Hospital, San Francisco, and the California Hospital, Los Angeles. The demonstrations were supported with state funds to show that acute alcoholics could

be treated in the general hospital medical wards of private hospitals without use of locked rooms, special nurses or other unusual measures.

Mt. Zion Hospital subsequently changed its admission policy on intoxicated patients, reporting that no difficulties are encountered if the hospital staff is trained to understand alcoholism and the patients are screened to eliminate psychotic cases.

There is an urgent and continuing need for long term studies to learn more about the causes of alcoholism, according to scientists who met recently with the staff of the Division of Alcoholic Rehabilitation.

These studies into the cause of alcoholism, researchers believe, should be carried out over a five to ten-year period to determine, for example, what scientifically verifiable signs can be identified for diagnosing the incipient alcoholic.

The complexity and extent of the problem makes it desirable to carry on applied studies to find out more about how public and private organizations can be more effective in assisting in the control and prevention of alcoholism. Related to this is the need for pinning down specifically the social factors which may promote alcoholism or create susceptibility to it.

Other areas in need of investigation are: Metabolic studies to determine precisely what the effects of alcohol are in its process of oxidation by the body; evaluation studies of the use of various drugs, particularly stimulants and tranquilizers, during

acute intoxication, in withdrawal stages and in continued periods of abstinence.

Specialties represented at the meeting included internal medicine, psychiatry, sociology, psychology, neurology, pharmacology and public health.

A five-year grant of \$383,000 from the National Institutes of Health has been awarded the State Health Department for the establishment of an Epidemiology Training Center.

The Center, the first established by a state health department, will provide opportunities for graduate physicians, biostatisticians, public health nurses, veterinarians and social scientists to learn through practical experience in the field and in the laboratory.

Training Center facilities will give opportunity for practical research as well as experience in the development of epidemiologic concepts in relation to newer areas of public health interest such as prevention of accidents and control of alcoholism.

The trainees will participate in department activities and studies, such as the tumor registry, field study of epidemics, cooperative studies of disease outbreaks in hospitals and surveillance of central nervous system diseases.

They also will have opportunity to observe the use of epidemiological methods in studies on the etiologic factors in cancer, prevention of blindness, accidental poisonings, evaluation of the treatment of alcoholism, coronary heart disease and acute respiratory disease of virus origin.

